

Mr. Speaker, we believe it is time to review our foreign policy in light of the changes occurring in the world, our national interests, our capabilities and the new constraints that we now face.

Our Red Book outlined several initiatives a Liberal government intended to pursue. Since my appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs on November 4, 1993, I have taken steps to implement these initiatives.

First, the Government will soon be ratifying the Law of the Sea Convention. We recognize that Canadians, especially those from the Atlantic region, want a more effective international regime for managing fish stocks on the high seas. To this end, my colleague the Minister of Fisheries went to New York yesterday to attend a special United Nations conference on this issue.

Furthermore, I have asked my officials to produce a working paper on UN reform issues in preparation for the 50th anniversary of the UN in 1995. I want to point out that Canada has always played a relatively prominent role at the UN. We have given an important grant to the United Nations Association in Canada to promote Canadians' awareness of UN reform in the context of the 50th anniversary.

Together with my colleague the Minister of the Environment, I am also pursuing means to make sustainable development a key component of our approach to international assistance.

In our Red Book, we also spoke of our desire to make Canada's foreign policy development more democratic. Our determination has not flagged.

This is why I am pleased to open the debate on Canada's foreign policy review in this House today.

We promised to develop an independent foreign policy for Canada. What does that mean? It means first and foremost to have the political courage to say what we think. To dare say what we think, sometimes in spite of others, to say it often before others, but also to always say it better than others. Our foreign policy must not only be independent but also more democratic, and the best way to make it more democratic is, of course, to listen to the concerns and interests of Canadians. This is why we want to broaden the public consultation process and enable Parliament to play a major role in this review.

We promised to allow Parliament to express its views on major international issues. Indeed, the members of this House have been able to debate our peacekeeping role in Bosnia and cruise missile testing in Canada. I believe that these new initiatives must be pursued. I also think that the parliamentary committee has a unique opportunity to debate the major issues which must be reviewed in the context of our foreign policy review.